

Essays on Consumption among Migrant Consumers

The proliferation of a wide variety of goods and services in capitalist societies has made consumption an important area of study in marketing. Consumption underlies many of the fundamental economic and cultural transformations occurring across the globe. The increasing prominence of consumption has given rise to the phenomenon of consumer culture. Migration of consumers across international borders is one of the key issues underlying global consumer culture. Migrants take with them the culture of their home countries, and interact with the dominant cultures they inhabit in various ways. The migrant experience contributes to the consumption practices of these consumers. Moreover, migrants also influence the cultures to which they migrate. Consumption thus occupies an important place in the settings in which migrants and dominant cultures interact with each other. This dissertation aims to further understanding of consumption among subaltern migrant consumers by examining three issues: sacrifice carried out by subaltern consumers in the form of deferment of consumption, acculturation of subaltern consumers and the negotiation and cleansing of stigma in the context of subaltern consumption. I employ interpretive methods of enquiry in Kerala and Dubai to understand these issues.

Deferment of consumption is a ubiquitous phenomenon, and is an important topic of study in consumer research. Extant research primarily examines deferment of consumption for the consumer's own future consumption. Scholars have theorized on deferment of consumption predominantly through the perspectives of temporal construal of consumers and utility. I argue that deferment of consumption can be more richly understood through the perspective of consumer sacrifice. My findings reveal that there are important similarities between sacrificial ritual and deferment of consumption by subaltern consumers. I also contribute to further understanding of consumer resistance and anti-consumption. Extant theorization suggests that consumer resistance and anti-consumption are driven by consumer identity, nationalism, resistance to business corporations, exploitation of consumers, and concern for the environment. I show that resistance to consumption can also take the form of sacrifices of current consumption for the benefit of self and significant others.

The increase in globalization is accompanied by large numbers of consumers moving across international borders. The contact between migrants' home cultures

and the dominant cultures to which they migrate results in various forms of consumer acculturation. The more recent studies on consumer acculturation suggest that consumer acculturation is not a linear process that results in assimilation of migrants into dominant cultures. Rather, consumer acculturation is dialogical and involves constant negotiation between the dominant and home cultures. In my dissertation, I examine consumer acculturation among subaltern migrants and show that subaltern consumers can use the market and social networks in the dominant culture to continue the consumption practices of the home culture. I also highlight the concept of the restricted performative space occupied by subaltern consumers abroad, and show how opening up of the performative space in the home culture results in performance of consumption.

Stigma is an issue that is salient among subaltern consumers who get stigmatized due to lack of resources and inability to consume. Consumer researchers have examined coping strategies employed by stigmatized consumers, and the role of the institutional context in routinizing stigma. Extant research looks at stigma arising out of deviant consumption practices. I highlight the ways in which subaltern consumers negotiate stigma while in the dominant culture, and cleanse stigma in the home culture through consumption. I contribute to further understanding of the ways in which context influences stigmatization. I further show how consumers can employ consumption as a means to counter stigma. I also show that consumers can get restigmatized due to broader socio-economic changes beyond their control.